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Alcohol and Native Races:

THE CASE OF OUR WEST AFRICAN COLONIES.

BY

JOHN NEWTON

(*Secretary of the Native Races and the Liquor Traffic United Committee*).

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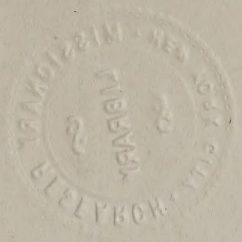

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— THE CASE OF OUR — WEST AFRICAN COLONIES

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(*Secretary of the Native Races and the Liquor Traffic United Committee*).

OUR WEST AFRICAN COLONIES.

In our West African Colonies, Nigeria (North and South), Gold Coast, Sierra Leone and Gambia, we have a total population of over 20,000,000, not one in a thousand of whom are whites. We govern these peoples autocratically, often by young men who on arrival in Africa find themselves endowed with enormous powers under slight restrictions. Parliament gives little thought to these peoples unless a war breaks out or some grave scandal occurs. Then there is a sudden blaze of interest, a few fiery speeches are made, and the interest quickly dies out and everything is forgotten.

Fortunately there have been men in high authority, like Sir Leslie Probyn and Sir Frederick Lugard, who have carefully studied the best interests of the natives, and have done much to minimise the evils resulting from the introduction of European spirits into these Colonies, but the period of office in West Africa is necessarily brief, and it often seems difficult to obtain a continuity of policy.

If public opinion in this country were properly informed concerning the evils and dangers consequent upon the introduction of spirits among these peoples, many of whom are but slowly emerging from barbarism, it is difficult to believe that the state of things roughly outlined in these pages would be allowed long to continue. General ignorance and indifference—plus financial interest—are the enemies of reform here as elsewhere.

With but slight fluctuations—due to variations in trade—there appears to be a steady increase in the inflow of spirits into West Africa. During the past dozen years great strides have been made in opening up these countries and developing their

resources. The various Governments are building railways, making roads, running motor cars and river steamers, and doing splendid work in developing trade and commerce. But when the native barters so large a proportion of the products of his industry for European spirits, who can say that he is altogether a better man for the changed conditions? And who can deny that the missionary is gravely hindered in his Christianising and civilising work by this traffic?

DIMENSIONS OF THE SPIRIT TRAFFIC.

Let us look at the size this traffic has assumed during recent years. At the time of writing, complete figures are available from the Colonial Office Reports up to the end of 1912 only, and from these Reports the following table is compiled, with the exception of Gambia for 1912. For some unexplained reason the quantities of spirits imported are not stated in the Colonial Office Report for that year, values only being given. Therefore the figures for Gambia for the year 1912 have been taken from the "Colonial Statistics, 1912."

Years	Total Gallons	Annual Average
	Southern Nigeria.	
1907-9	10,240,990	3,413,663
1910-12	14,033,698	4,677,899
	Gold Coast.	
1907-9	3,640,074	1,213,358
1910-12	4,976,610	1,658,870
	Sierra Leone.	
1907-9	1,028,848	342,949
1910-12	1,497,763	499,254
	Gambia.	
1907-9	87,993	29,331
1910-12	183,443	61,147

Each Colony shows a substantial increase in its importation of spirits. The total for the four Colonies above named for the first three years stood at 14,997,905 gallons, whilst the total for the second three years reached 20,691,514 gallons, an increase of 5,693,609 gallons. The average annual importation of the first

three years was 4,999,301 gallons, and for the second three years 6,897,171, showing an increase of 1,897,870 gallons.

The increase in the period under review is so great that any slight reduction in the alcoholic strength of the spirits imported. which is claimed by Southern Nigeria and Sierra Leone, is of small account.

To these figures should be added an annual importation of over 10,000 gallons of spirits into Northern Nigeria, which is prohibition territory.

What these figures mean is that, as the countries are being opened up to trade, the spirit importers take advantage of the openings, and spread more widely their baneful traffic, thus making what might be a means of civilisation into a means of a deeper degradation.

Further, many District Commissioners encourage the use of spirits among the Chieftains whom they visit on their tours. Within the knowledge of many missionaries still at work the kola-nut and water used to be considered sufficient refreshment during a ceremonial visit ; now " whiskey and soda " is very frequently served to Government officials. If these men in responsible posts would refuse to drink with the native Chiefs, a check would be put upon the growth of this dangerous custom. Whereas now the native looks upon the use of spirits as being sanctioned and favoured by Government authority.

In Sierra Leone, it is stated from various quarters, the District Commissioners, as a rule, do not favour the use of the Local Option power of prohibition conferred on each Chiefdom by Sir Leslie Probyn when Governor of the Colony. Hence the law remains unused, as natives of all classes are slow to do anything which they think the Government officials would not like.

An effort is now being made by the Native Races Committee to organise a movement, through the various Churches in Sierra Leone, in favour of the use of the Local Option law, and to establish a native Temperance Reform Party for the dissemination of Temperance teaching.

Several reforms have recently been adopted in the various Colonies, as will be seen later, but the figures given above show

that they have failed to stop the steady increase of importation. They have not been drastic enough. Short of prohibiting the traffic altogether, which is the object to be aimed at, a great amount of good could be done by the officials in the directions suggested above. And if the various Governments refused to carry spirits on their railways, steamers, and motor cars, a great check would be put upon the spread of the traffic, and the prohibitory areas of the hinterland would be much better protected than they are at present.

NIGERIA.

Northern and Southern Nigeria have, since January, 1914, been united under one Governor—Sir Frederick Lugard—who has always viewed with a sympathetic eye any proposal for restricting the sale of spirits to natives.

Northern Nigeria is prohibition territory, but a certain amount of smuggling takes place from the Southern Province, not unfrequently by means of bottles and cases of gin suspended underneath the boats which navigate the rivers. The wonder is that so obvious a device never seems to be discovered by Government officials.

A system of "permits" has been established, by which "non-natives" are allowed two bottles of spirits per week. "Non-natives" means those men who have moved inland from the coastal regions or from their own Chiefdom. Thus many Africans are getting liquor, and the careless way in which the "permits" are said to be issued is creating a serious evil. Cases have been brought to Sir Frederick Lugard's notice by the Native Races Committee, and it is hoped that the needed remedies will soon be applied. Some gross evils either have been, or are in process of being, cured, as the following instances show:—

The institution of a West African silver currency, strongly urged by the Native Races Committee as both possible and urgently desirable, and long opposed by many officials as "impossible," is now an accomplished fact, and the reports are most encouraging as to the willingness of the natives to use the coinage. By this means it is hoped that the use of the gin bottle as currency will gradually be destroyed. It will take time, as the gin bottle has a firm hold, but the "impossible" reform has begun well.

The payment of fines in gin, vehemently denied by the officials, has now been ended, according to official reports. It has at least been heavily checked, if not quite ended as yet.

Pawning children for gin debts still, unfortunately, continues, but the abolition of the House Ordinance, which took effect on January 1st, 1915, will probably put a check on this gross evil, by abolishing all forms of domestic slavery.

A new area of prohibition has recently been proclaimed in the north-east corner of Southern Nigeria. It is a thinly populated area, it is true, but one is thankful for any gain.

The new port—Port Harcourt—which is being built on one of the mouths of the Niger, and will be the head of a big railway system in a few years, has been declared by Sir Frederick Lugard a prohibition town, in which no liquor can be sold to natives. All sales of land are made on condition that no liquor shall be sold.

These are reforms for which we may be duly grateful. But the evil remains on a large scale. All native ceremonies of a social or domestic character are, in many parts, accompanied by orgies of drinking, sometimes extending to two or three weeks. The evil has grown to these gross proportions during the lifetime of many missionaries still at work, and it is very disheartening to them at times to see their work so hindered and undone by the inflow of spirits.

One lady missionary, who has remained at work at a lonely station after the death of her husband, reports that, when they went out 30 years ago, spirits were hardly ever seen. Now gin is so common that the women are washing new-born babies in it, in order to give them the power of the white man, the secret of whose strength they believe gin to be. Such is "civilisation" as presented to the native mind of West Africa.

GOLD COAST.

All reports which reach us from the Gold Coast speak of the drink evil as growing at an alarming rate. There appears to be no exception in the available testimony. One missionary wrote a few months ago to say that when he went down to the Custom

House at Seccondee for a case of Bibles which had been forwarded to him, he was told by the officials to come again in two days time as there were 16,000 cases of gin and rum to be removed before his *one* case of Bibles could be reached.

What is the outlook for the Gold Coast under these conditions? Liquor is steadily finding its way into the interior, where, at the present rate of progress, drunkenness will soon be as common as in the coastal regions.

Raising the duty on spirits is good as far as it goes—the duty now stands at 6s. 3d. per gallon on the West Coast—but it does not go far enough. And it even has its disadvantages. Petty Chieftains put pressure upon their people to produce more goods in order to meet the increased price, and when, as frequently happens, they take out a licence, they frequently levy a tax upon their villages in order to pay the licence fee. The native Christians strongly protest against being called upon to pay for a thing they are taught to abhor, but no remedy has yet been applied.

One traveller reported in 1912 that he had seen a body of youths reeling drunk through the streets of Accra singing "Onward, Christian Soldiers." Thus is the missionary's work undone.

Two years ago the Governor was reported to have said that if the drink traffic continues at its present rate of increase it will destroy Christianity in the Gold Coast.

SIERRA LEONE.

Even before Sierra Leone was established by the British Government as a home for freed slaves, liquor had been introduced, probably by the Portuguese. When the first piece of land was purchased from the natives on August 22nd, 1788, part of the purchase price was stated to be: "One puncheon of rum, eight dozen bottles of wine, and one dozen bottles of red port wine."

Sierra Leone was fortunate in having for a time a most enlightened Governor in the person of Sir Leslie Probyn. He favoured the establishment of a native Temperance movement to check the growing evils which he saw and dreaded, and he

enacted a Local Option law for the Colony, referred to in an earlier portion of this article.

It is clear that for the establishment of a Native Temperance movement and the use of the Local Option law, help will be needed from this country. This help the Native Races Committee are arranging to provide.

There is in existence an Evangelical Reform Association, which has two objects, the promotion of Temperance and Purity. Through this organisation it is hoped that some vigorous work may be done, and particularly that the timidity of the Chiefs, in making use of the Local Option powers conferred upon them, may be overcome. Only an active public opinion, fostered and led by Europeans, can counteract the dead weight of an unsympathetic officialism, which is generally said to be against the use of this law.

One large area of the hinterland has been declared under prohibition, the Koinadugu Province, largely, we are informed, through the work of a sympathetic District Commissioner.

The figures of importation show that in this Colony, as elsewhere on the Coast, an improving trade brings an increased expenditure on liquor.

GAMBIA.

Gambia is the smallest of our West African Colonies, consisting merely of a strip of land on either side of the River Gambia, from the mouth to about 160 miles—in a direct line—inland. Small as it is, it unfortunately falls into line with its larger neighbours on the Coast and shows a steadily increasing importation of spirits. Holland appears to send more than any other country, according to the Annual Report of the Colony.

Germany—through Hamburg—has supplied a large proportion of the spirits which have hitherto gone to West Africa. The war, has, of course, stopped this direct supply, and it was hoped that it would end the German traffic. But it is doubtful if this has happened, as the land communication between Germany and Holland is open, and the trade from Holland is not seriously interfered with.

Tables at the end of this paper will show the countries from which spirits go to West Africa, and the amount in each case.

REFORMS ADOPTED.

Summing up the whole position, several encouraging reforms have been adopted during the past four or five years, which, although falling far short of a complete remedy for the evils complained of, are at the least points to the good, and are indications of a movement, however slow, in the right direction.

1. The duty on spirits has been raised throughout our West African Colonies to 6s. 3d. per gallon.*

2. Distillation has been prohibited in the whole of our West African Colonies.

3. A system of Local Option has been adopted in the Colony of Sierra Leone.

4. Several additions have been made to the areas of prohibition of the hinterland.

5. Port Harcourt, Southern Nigeria, has been declared a prohibition town.

6. Steps have been taken to suppress the custom of accepting the payment of fines in gin at local courts in Southern Nigeria.

7. A silver coinage has been established which it is hoped will eventually oust the gin bottle as a form of currency.

REFORMS SUGGESTED.

Short of the absolute prohibition of the traffic, which is the only real solution, various necessary and urgently needed reforms might easily be adopted.

1. The abuses of the "permit" system in areas of prohibition should be drastically dealt with; fewer and more responsible men should be appointed to issue "permits" if the system is continued; and a less elastic interpretation of the word "non-natives" should be officially adopted. It is alleged by some missionaries that a knowledge of English, however small, is considered sufficient to qualify for a "permit."

2. Smuggling into prohibition areas, especially by river, should be rigidly suppressed.

*On January 12th, 1915, the duty in Nigeria was raised to 7s. 6d. per gallon.

3. Government railways, motor cars, and steamers, should not be allowed to carry spirits at all. They now take them comparatively near to prohibition areas, and so help to make smuggling over the borders easy.

4. Government officials should be instructed not to drink spirits when on ceremonial visits to Chiefs, nor to offer them when Chiefs visit the officials.

5. A licence should not be issued to every person who chooses to pay the fee, but the number should be strictly limited.

6. Chiefs should be prohibited from levying a tax upon their people in order to pay the fee when they take out a licence.

7. Each Chief should be allowed the option of keeping spirits out of his Chiefdom, if he and his people desire, and Government officials should be instructed to encourage the use of this power, and not to discourage it, as they are reported to do now. When on tour the District Commissioners should explain to the Chiefs that they have the right to exclude spirits.

8. Prohibition areas should be gradually extended from the hinterland towards the Coast.

9. The importation of absinthe should be absolutely prohibited, as has been done by France in the Ivory Coast.

10. Government officials should be instructed to adopt a friendly and sympathetic attitude to all movements in favour of Temperance among the natives, and to endeavour to remove the impression, now so widely prevalent in West Africa, that the British Government favours the spirit traffic because of the revenue it derives from it.

These reforms, and such as these, touching not merely the letter of the law but the spirit of administration, would do much to mitigate the evils which have increased, are increasing, and ought to be diminished, pending their complete suppression.

APPENDIX.

The following Tables are compiled from:—

"*Statistical Tables relating to British Self-Governing Dominions, Colonies, Possessions and Protectorates, 1912.*"

WEST AFRICAN COLONIES.

IMPORTS FOR YEAR 1912, SHOWING COUNTRY OF ORIGIN.

(1) SOUTHERN NIGERIA.

Countries whence imported.	Brandy.	Gin.	Rum.	Whiskey.	Liqueurs.	Unenumerated.	Total Spirits.	Percentage of whole.
	Gallons.	Gallons.	Gallons.	Gallons.	Gallons.	Gallons.	Gallons.	Gallons.
United Kingdom	1,570	36,632	24,089	88,592	901	1,991	153,775	3·4
Germany	1,412	888,258	305,118	—	—	9,248	1,204,036	27·0
Holland...	—	2,969,912	116,531	—	—	—	3,086,443	69·3
Other Foreign Countries ...	383	20	4,149	623	514	252	5,941	·3
Totals ...	3,365	3,894,822	449,887	89,215	1,415	11,491	4,450,195	—

(2) NORTHERN NIGERIA.

Countries whence imported.	Brandy.	Gin.	Rum.	Whiskey.	Liqueurs.	Unenumerated. (a)	Total Spirits.	Percentage of whole.
	Gallons.	Gallons.	Gallons.	Gallons.	Gallons.	Gallons.	Gallons.	Gallons.
United Kingdom	—	3,123	—	4,484	—	218	7,825	75·9
Germany	—	1,725	—	120	—	106	2,051	19·9
Holland	—	426	—	—	—	—	426	4·2
Totals ...	—	5,274	—	4,604	—	421	10,302	—

(a) Estimated on Southern Nigerian prices for 1912, value only given.

(3) GOLD COAST.

Countries whence imported.	Brandy.	Gin.	Rum.	Whiskey.	Liqueurs.	Unenumerated.	Total Spirits.	Percentage of whole
	Gallons.	Gallons.	Gallons.	Gallons.	Gallons.	Gallons.	Gallons.	Gallons.
United Kingdom	1,325	21,174	5,276	44,196	—	—	71,971	3·8
British Possessions ...	—	85	—	82	—	—	167	—
United States	—	—	1,030,383	—	—	—	1,030,383	55·6
Holland...	—	540,067	61,298	—	—	—	601,365	32·4
Germany	—	16,320	78,046	—	—	—	94,366	5·1
Canary Islands	—	—	45,303	—	—	—	45,303	2·4
Other Countries	884	1,029	4,169	1,333	—	—	7,415	·4
Totals ...	2,209	578,675	1,224,475	45,611	—	—	1,850,970	—

(4) SIERRA LEONE.

Countries whence imported.	Brandy.	Gin.	Rum.	Whiskey.	Liqueurs.	Unenumerated.	Total Spirits.	Percentage of whole.
	Gallons.	Gallons.	Gallons.	Gallons.	Gallons.	Gallons.	Gallons.	Gallons.
United Kingdom	—	5,672	69,690	—	—	—	75,362	13·0
British Possessions ...	—	142	115	—	—	—	257	·2
Germany	—	104,486	72,822	—	—	—	177,308	30·7
Holland...	—	301,971	20,444	—	—	—	322,415	55·8
Other Countries	—	—	2,024	—	—	—	2,024	·3
Totals ...	—	412,271	165,095	—	—	—	577,366	—

(5) GAMBIA.

Countries whence imported.	Brandy.	Gin.	Rum.	Whiskey.	Liqueurs.	Unenumerated.	Total Spirits.	Percentage of whole.
	Gallons.	Gallons.	Gallons.	Gallons.	Gallons.	Gallons.	Gallons.	Gallons.
United Kingdom	20	81	67	2,413	1,739	—	4,320	5·9
Germany	2	—	6,165	126	1,898	—	8,191	11·3
Holland	—	52,157	—	—	125	—	52,282	72·4
France	302	—	455	—	4,335	—	5,092	7·0
United States	—	—	2,275	—	—	—	2,275	3·1
Totals ...	324	52,238	8,962	2,539	8,097	—	72,160	—

THE UNITED COMMITTEE

For the Prevention of the Demoralization of the Native Races by the Liquor Traffic,

177-8 Palace Chambers, 9 Bridge Street, Westminster.

The Committee consists of delegates from twelve Missionary and twelve national Temperance Societies. It is strictly non-sectarian and non-party, and in carrying out its policy of protecting Native Races from the Liquor Traffic, the utmost harmony has prevailed throughout its history, and a large amount of good work has been done, particularly in Africa—Central, West and South—as also in Ceylon and the Islands of the Pacific.

The Committee has always been restricted in its work by a small income, and at the present time *it is urgently appealing to its friends for an additional £200 per annum*, so that it may enlarge the circulation of its literature in Africa as well as at home.

All communications to be addressed to the Secretary at the above address.

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